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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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NEW GUINEA IN THE NEWS

Global war has brought little-known countries into prominence. Take New Guinea, for example. You may remember from your school geography that this island is one of the East Indies, that it is important because it exports something or other. Fragments from some thriller you have read may come to mind—head hunters, humid jungles. You have not done too badly.

New Guinea is a large island between the Dutch East Indies and Australia. It is longer in its east-west extension than in its north-south width. A chain of plateaus and mountains runs east and west through the entire central area. Inland from Salamaua are important gold fields and gold is the most valuable export. Copra, from coconut plantations along the coast, is second.

Your Museum reporter has brushed up his geography by a visit to the Royal Ontario Museum. There he has talked to Dr. R. F. Fortune who has lived with the natives in New Guinea. He agrees that the climate there is prevailingly hot and moist on the coast but more bracing on the central plateau. He states that the native people are woolly-haired and dark-skinned, some of whom have a negroid appearance. Others appear more like Malay people and Polynesians.

The area where United Nations soldiers are fighting is fairly well explored. The natives of this area are strongly influenced by the white man. Many of them are Christians. But, in the central mountains, south-west from Salamaua and north-west from Port Moresby, natives are not under Government control. There, two or three hundred thousand black men still use stone axes and settle their arguments with arrows and lances. Their utensils, weapons and sea-shell currency are on view in the Museum.

DRESSED LIKE A QUEEN

Now we know what it means to be "dressed like a Queen." Recently three dresses worn by Queen Alexandra were given to the Royal Ontario Museum by Lt.-Col. James W. Flanagan. They are on exhibition in the costume gallery.

The first of these dresses was worn at a ball given at Balmoral, when Alexandra first came to England, as the bride of the Prince of Wales, in 1863. It is a gay, young dress of crinoline style, with cream satin skirt trimmed with red-edged ruffles, and bright over-skirt of the Dress Stewart plaid. The other two dresses are much more dignified and stately and were worn shortly after Alexandra became queen in 1902. Both have the small waist and long lines fashionable at that period, and are of exquisitely embroidered satin. These dresses make it easy to understand Queen Alexandra's reputation for beauty and queenly grace.

An adjacent case contains the magnificent robe of purple velvet trimmed with ermine, which was worn by H.R.H. the Princess Victoria at the Coronation of Edward VII. This robe, which is also the gift of Lt.-Col. Flanagan, will give Canadians a very clear picture of the pomp and magnificence of a Coronation ceremony.

TRAILING CHRISTMAS

As the Yuletide season approaches many people in the Maritimes will be using for decoration a little plant spoken of locally as Trailing Christmas but more widely known as Ground Pine. Botanically speaking this plant, which consists of creeping stems and erect branches beset with prickly needle-shaped leaves, is classified with the club mosses or lycopods.

The ancestors of these little plants flourished in the Coal Age some 300,000,000 years ago. They were giant trees which lived in widespread jungle swamps. Fossilized remains of some of these prehistoric trees may be seen in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. The accumulated remains of these trees including the stems, branches, roots, and spores, after burial in the swamps, were subjected to intense heat and pressure and finally converted into coal. Cannel coal, the variety with which we make such bright, crackling fires at Christmas, is formed largely from the spores of these ancient club mosses.

SANTA HAS NO TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM

Everyone knows that Santa Claus drives a dashing team of reindeer. But do you know that reindeer live in Canada? Only on Christmas Eve do they go dashing over house-tops with jingling bells. At other times they are found placidly roving the tundra and wilderness of the north.

Reindeer are found in all the Arctic lands around the pole,—northern Europe, northern Asia and northern North America. In Lapland, which embraces northern Sweden, northern Finland and northeastern Russia, the reindeer has been domesticated for centuries. In Arctic America the wild reindeer is called caribou. Several types of caribou are displayed in the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum. They are such characteristic Canadian animals that our new twenty-five cent piece carries a fine reproduction of a caribou head.

With the great reduction of Canada caribou herds, domestic reindeer from Europe have been brought in to take their place and Eskimos are now being trained to look after herds in Canada's northland. Santa Claus will have no difficulty in obtaining a fresh team when he needs it.

ON THE HOME FRONT

Day in and day out groups of school children, classes of teachers-in-training, soldiers, sailors and plain citizens visit the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum. They seek a respite from the tasks of war to refresh themselves. A long succession of natural and man-wrought events are brought to mind by the assembled objects.

In war and peace the museum fulfils its allotted task of preserving objects selected from the world in which we live, of presenting a picture of the universe, and of encouraging human curiosity and sympathy. Even in Old World countries where shell-fire and falling cities threaten these institutions, museums carry on. Men tenaciously and wisely clings to the cultural and intangible aspects of life. He hopefully looks aside to the wonder of nature and the beauty of art.